

GREENPRINT CHALLENGE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. GREENPRINT CHALLENGE CONCEPT

*The **Greenprint Challenge** is an integral part of an overall long-range planning effort designed to provide the City of Lincoln and Lancaster County (Nebraska) with an approach for sound and sensitive urban and rural development. This approach weaves the community's desire for maintaining and enhancing the long term ecological and economic benefits that derive from our natural and historic cultural environment into our community's planning and implementation processes.*

The idea of a “**Greenprint**” is similar to that of a “blueprint” for building a home or developing a community—it is intended to serve both as a vision and as a detailed model for how natural and cultural features can be effectively maintained and can exist harmoniously with economic vitality and community growth.

The idea of a “**Challenge**” is intended to reflect the demanding character associated with pursuing a truly broad community vision requiring the marshaling of public and private forces based upon the prospects of long-term results.

Taken together, the “Greenprint Challenge” embodies a planning product, process and vision:

- ◆ It is a product in that it reports on existing environmental conditions in the city and county, sets potential planning priorities, and documents Greenprint planning activities completed to date.

- ◆ It is a process in that it extends past planning efforts by defining steps on how the community should effectively utilize our community's natural and cultural features in furthering long-term land use and economic planning objectives.
- ◆ It is a vision that entails a consciousness of the natural and cultural environment in all planning processes with a sensitivity to protecting signature landscapes while furthering quality growth and development.

The purpose of this report is to define a framework for using the Greenprint Challenge over the coming months in formulating a new City-County Comprehensive Plan and in pursuing other related planning and implementation activities. This will help ensure that our community's natural and cultural features are available to be enjoyed by us and future generations. If pursued, Greenprint Challenge can lead to the establishment of a vibrant, integrated system of open space and natural areas throughout the County.

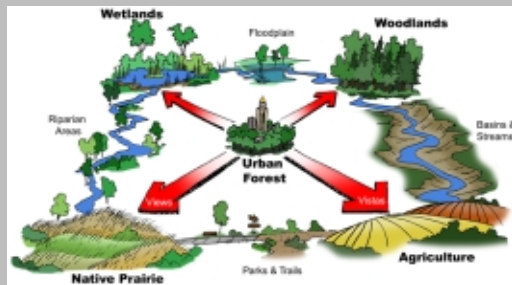
The balance of this summary offers a further description of the following topics:

- Natural Resource Framework
- Core Resource Imperatives
- Greenprint Challenge Themes
- Greenprint Challenge Implementation
- Relationship to City-County Comprehensive Planning Process

B. NATURAL RESOURCE FRAMEWORK

The Greenprint Challenge process involved an extensive review and discussion by a cabinet of natural resource experts of substantial amounts of digital data about Lancaster County's environmental features. This review involved identifying 13 imperatives within a broader natural resource framework. These imperatives include:

- ◆ Native Prairies
- ◆ Saline Wetlands
- ◆ Parks, Trail Corridors and Other Recreational Areas
- ◆ Floodplains
- ◆ Agricultural Lands
- ◆ Cultural and Historic Landscapes
- ◆ Freshwater Wetlands
- ◆ Riparian Areas
- ◆ Basins and Streams
- ◆ Urban Forest
- ◆ Threatened and Endangered Species
- ◆ Views and Vistas
- ◆ Woodlands



For each of these 13 natural resources imperatives, three key questions were considered by the panel of experts:

Why is this element important?

How is the element threatened by human activity?

What are the long-range planning implications for this element?

C. CORE RESOURCE IMPERATIVES

Based upon their review of available information—along with their knowledge of the region and of the individual resource imperatives—the cabinet of experts identified three “Core Resource Imperatives” for Lancaster County.

These imperatives are considered to be those allied natural resource features that should receive the greatest consideration in the long-range planning process.

The identification of these three imperatives should not be taken to mean that other natural features are unimportant, inconsequential, or expendable. The “Core Resource Imperatives” uniquely contribute to the natural resource heritage of the region and whose safeguarding for future generations is indispensable. Other elements that may not be included nevertheless remain important to the long-term environmental and economic viability of the community and should not be inordinately discounted.

The three “Core Resource Imperatives” called for within the Greenprint Challenge are as follows:

Saline and Freshwater Wetlands – Wetlands provide distinctive habitat opportunities for various plants and animals, as well as offering flood control and water filtration benefits. For example, Lancaster County is home to approximately 1200 acres of the very rare Eastern Saline Wetlands. These saline wetlands offer a unique habitat to numerous threatened and endangered species, including the Salt Creek Tiger Beetle.

Native Prairies – Prior to the European settlement period, tallgrass prairies dominated the Nebraska landscape. Native prairies remnants remain scattered throughout the County, providing a home to numerous grasses, wildflowers and forbs. The remaining native prairies are becoming more rare and thus are increasing in value as an ecological amenity. The prairies are a key component of the signature landscape the first Europeans encountered when they settled in Nebraska and remain a visual cue to Lincoln and Lancaster County’s “sense of place.”

Stream Corridors – Streams and their adjoining corridors snake their way throughout much of Lancaster County. Through the region, surface water runoff flows into these stream corridors that typically consist of floodplains and riparian areas. They are instrumental in providing habitat and water filtration benefits, along with serving as connectors to substantial natural areas.

D. GREENPRINT CHALLENGE THEMES

As noted above, a team of natural resource professionals was consulted while formulating the Greenprint Challenge. The discussion among these professionals lead to the creation of three overarching themes concerning the Greenprint Challenge process:

One: The Greenprint Challenge Seeks to be Broadly Inclusive

This theme suggests that the natural resource elements in the planning process should embrace several core values:

- Planning’s Impact Extends Beyond the County’s Boundaries: The planning process must recognize that the present and future environmental character of our community does not end at the

boarder of Lancaster County. Natural resources play a role in a much larger environmental network that extends beyond and across political boundaries. This basic tenant must be taken into consideration during the planning process.

- Convergence of Urban and Rural Environmental Concerns: Just as sound long-range planning should not stop at the edge of the County, the planning process should not indiscriminately differentiate between natural resource planning for urban and rural developments. Both should receive equal priority, and policies should be established that incorporate the needs of both development communities.
- Build Upon Existing Public-Private Alliances and Partnerships: The Greenprint Challenge recognizes the fundamental need to seek a strong partnership between the public and private sectors in furthering the Plan’s proposed environmental vision. The thoughtful integration of the community’s environmental destiny will necessarily consist of a network of publicly- and privately-held and managed land.
- Capitalize Upon Both the Environmental and Economic Benefits of Our Community’s Natural Assets: In selecting a community to live and work in, individuals and families seek pleasing environmental amenities. Such amenities may exist immediately next door to them or may be part of the larger community in which they live. These amenities can range from small neighborhood parks to large natural areas that offer a range of outdoor activities. A recent National Association of Realtors® publication referred to this idea as embodying “Twice Green Results.” This idea suggests that preserving natural resource features as part

of the urban and rural landscape have both environmental and economic paybacks—the latter being in the form of potentially higher returns on real estate investments and a community that is overall more attractive for growth.

Two: The Greenprint Challenge Supports Maintaining Richness and Diversity Within the County's Urban and Rural Environments

The second theme touches upon the variety and wealth of natural features present in the County today as well as historically, and of the means for maintaining richness and diversity in the future :

- The County Boasts a Diversity of Natural Resources and Landscape Types: Within Lancaster County's 846 square miles is a varied ecosystem of rolling prairies, riparian corridors, natural flood plains, wetlands, and wooded areas. The Greenprint Challenge recognizes and respects this diversity. Lancaster County provides a home to a wide range of native, cultivated and domesticated animal and plant species. Native grasses and flowers, along with numerous crops, still thrive in the County's rich soils. And while the animal species roaming the County are markedly different from those here prior to European settlement, an abundance of birds, mammals and other animals call the County their home.
- The County is Home to a Distinctive Association of Endangered Plants and Animals: Several threatened or endangered plants and animals are found or pass through Lancaster County. The salt-wort, western glasswort, and the western prairie fringe orchid are all threatened or endangered plants. The Salt Creek Tiger Beetle and the Least Bittern are threatened or endangered animals finding home in Lancaster County.

- Maintenance of Natural Features Recognizes the Individual Context Within Which They Reside: Lancaster County exhibits a wide range of rural and natural settings. The Greenprint Challenge attempts to fashion a web-like pattern that recognizes and yet permeates through all of the County's various settings. Maintenance of these resources—including buffering and upkeep—should consider adjoining users. Similarly, land ownership and management responsibilities should include private and public interests. The long-term commitment to the resource imperatives should be shared by the public and private sectors.

Three: The Greenprint Challenge Focuses Attention on Unique Landscapes in the County:

The final theme emphasizes an important component of the environmental legacy of the County, namely the region's "signature landscape:"

- Candidate "Signature Landscapes" Defined: "Signature landscapes" serve as a constant reminder of the particular ecosystem that forms our economic base. They provide much of the sense of who we are as well as how and why we are tied together. Obvious County landscapes include native tall grass prairies, wetlands, and other biological communities that support threatened and endangered species.
- Secure and Management of "Signature Landscapes:" As part of the overall follow up to the Greenprint Challenge, ensuring the long-term viability of the special "signature landscapes" should be afforded. This includes integrating the unique shapes and conditions of these landscapes into the urban fabric.

E. GREENPRINT CHALLENGE IMPLEMENTATION**GREENPRINT PLANNING INITIATIVES****City-County Comprehensive Plan**

- Greenprint should serve as the ecological footprint in the new Comprehensive Plan
- Elements from the Greenprint should form a chapter in the new Comprehensive Plan and be a key component in the preparation of other chapters
- Natural and cultural resource information sources in Greenprint should be available to comprehensive planning process participants
- A study should be completed to ensure development of mechanisms to sustain Greenprint concepts

City Parks Forum

- Organize and conduct community summit open to all citizens
- Develop priorities and strategies for implementing Greenprint
- Develop marketing plan and promotional literature
- Contract technical assistance to develop a public land trust

Other On-Going City-County Studies and Activities

- Establish a coordinated effort between study sponsors and City-County Planning Department regarding Greenprint concepts
- Integrate “core resource imperatives” in mission statements or study purposes
- Expand use of digital information bases utilized in the Greenprint process
- Continue dialogue between participants regarding Greenprint as individual studies progress

Miscellaneous Greenprint Implementation Action

- Incorporate scientific data on flora, fauna, geology and archeology into Planning Department’s “Natural Resources-Geographic Information System”
- Document historic, cultural and archeological sites in County
- Collect baseline data on wildlife needs and strategy
- Create Site Ranking Criteria for threatened sites
- Develop a County-wide Parks and Recreation Plan
- Document land valuation effects of natural areas and parks
- Investigate and develop a land trust

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

- Conduct outreach efforts to bring together private land owners, environmental interests, and the development community
- Promote common ground among diverse interest groups with information on such concepts as “Twice Green Results”

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

- Develop a capital programming approach that provides for acquiring park property and natural areas identified in Greenprint
- Pursue grant funding resources such as Land and Water Conservation Fund, various floodplain and water related funding programs, Nebraska Environmental Trust on a continual basis
- Initiate a land trust and seek land donations and funding

CORE RESOURCE IMPERATIVES

- The Greenprint Cabinet identified Saline and Freshwater Wetlands, Native Prairies, and Stream Corridors as the three “Core Resource Imperatives” for Lancaster County
- These three imperatives do not mean that other natural features are unimportant, inconsequential, or expendable
- The “Core Resource Imperatives” uniquely contribute to the natural resource heritage of the region and should be safeguarded

PLANNING ADMINISTRATION AND INTERAGENCY COORDINATION

- Investigate developing a County-wide Parks and Recreation Department
- Investigate use of environmental planning policies on sensitive areas that ensure oversight when land use changes are sought
- Encourage use of conservation easements on sensitive areas
- Utilize purchase of development rights
- Elevate the importance of environmental analysis in land use planning
- Develop planning policies for acreage development consistent with Greenprint
- Conserve natural resources through amendment of City and County zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations
- Coordinate future trail network extensions and enhancements
- Develop management guidelines for natural areas
- Inventory and advance existing plans such as Crescent Green Park, Wilderness Park Subarea Plan, Stevens Creek Watershed Management Plan
- Plan for long-term preservation of existing and future public and private conservation areas
- Determine appropriate agency to manage and/or hold title to resources identified in Greenprint
- Identify appropriate governmental entity with authority to maintain and operate county-wide park and recreation program

F. RELATIONSHIP TO CITY-COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING PROCESS

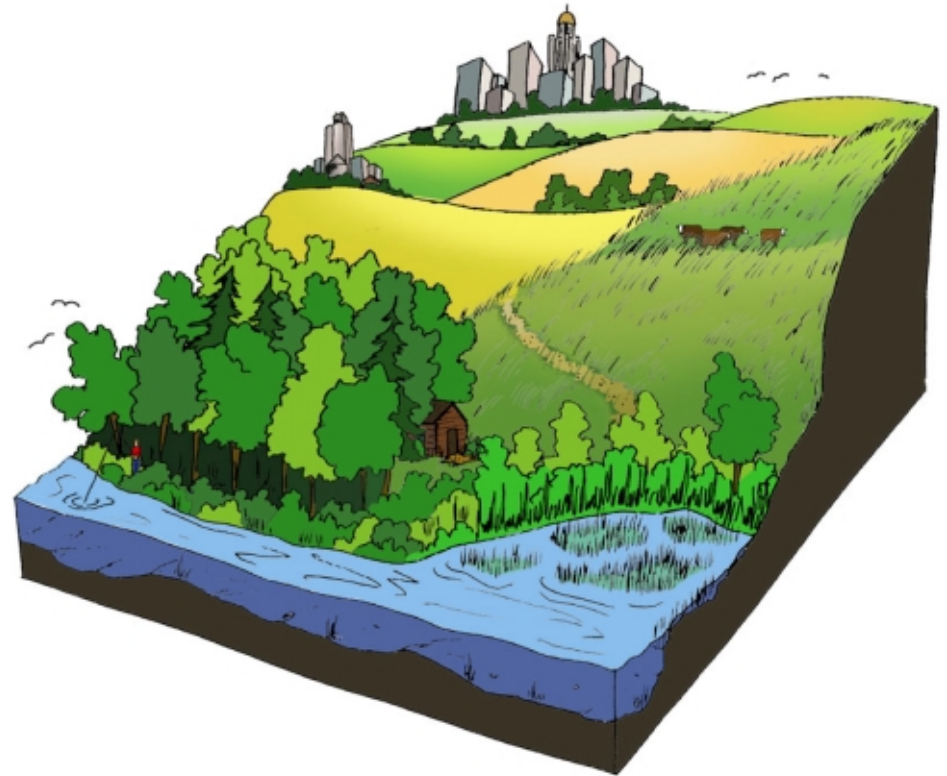
The county-wide challenge is intended to serve as a key element in developing a new Comprehensive Plan for the City of Lincoln and Lancaster County.

The Greenprint Challenge should serve as the environmental and natural resource underpinning of the Plan's overall design and should ultimately help frame the preparation of the Comprehensive Plan's future land use policy directive. It will also serve to guide the planning for future parks, open spaces and trails.

The fundamental relationship between the Comprehensive Plan and the Greenprint Challenge has been established in part through the drafting of the Plan's working "Vision Statement." This Vision states in part,

"Clean air, clean water, parks and open space, mature trees, signature habitats, and prime and productive farmlands are valuable assets. Conservation areas, floodplains, green spaces, and parks define, and help create linkages between, neighborhoods and surrounding population areas. The Comprehensive Plan takes into consideration the effects of natural phenomena not only upon localized development, but also the community as a whole, upon private ownership issues, and upon recreational opportunities. The Plan thus commits Lincoln and Lancaster County to preserve unique and sensitive habitats and endorses creative integration of natural systems into developments."

This Vision Statement gives direction to the role that the County's natural features play in fulfilling the Plan's land use planning policies. The Greenprint Challenge serves as an ethic that should influence all City-County planning processes.



The Greenprint Supports Maintaining Richness and Diversity